

Marked by the ubiquitous color pink, October represents the month of the year during which we collectively direct our attention towards breast cancer. National Breast Cancer Awareness Month provides an annual opportunity to raise both awareness and hope for millions of America's women and men affected by breast cancer.

This month of awareness began 20 years ago as a simple, week-long event designed to inform the public about the disease, as well as emphasize the need for accessible mammography. Today, numerous national public service organizations, professional medical associations and government agencies collaborate during the month to promote both prevention and treatment.

While breast cancer mortality rates have been declining since 1990, there is still much work to be done. Recent statistics indicate that more than 40,000 women will die from breast cancer in 2007. This is 40,000 too many.

Despite being a leading cause of death among women, particularly between the ages of 45 and 54, detection in the early stages has yielded a more than 98 percent overall survival rate. It is critical that we continue to promote earlier detection through screening and conduct research to find new treatments and cures.

While we have made considerable progress in informing the public about breast cancer, we cannot allow ourselves to become complacent. Breast cancer can be an understandably difficult topic to discuss. However, I encourage you to remind those at risk you know and love to be proactive and take preventative measures by getting mammograms, doing regular breast self-exams and talking to their doctors.

Together, we can continue to increase awareness, promote prevention and treatment options and lower the mortality rate of breast cancer.